



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

SRI LANKA

SNAPSHOT Youth Unite to Speak Out Against Sexual Violence

Youth participate in anti-sexual violence campaign despite military crackdown on peaceful protests.



Sri Lanka work together to distribute leaflets.

USAID assistance bridged ethnic divides to bring together more than 1,000 individuals across six districts to raise awareness on sexual violence.

Telling Our Story

U.S. Agency for International Development
Washington, DC 20523-1000
<http://stories.usaid.gov>

March 2013 – Bridging ethnic divides, youth from northern and southern Sri Lanka united in the northern capital of Jaffna to lead more than 1,000 individuals from across six districts to participate in a series of peaceful demonstrations against sexual violence held throughout November and December 2012. Part of the “It’s time to talk about it. Talk early. Talk often. Prevent sexual violence.” campaign, the demonstrations were public, loud, non-violent, and successfully uninterrupted by military or police.

The events were in contrast to a peaceful demonstration at the University of Jaffna last year that turned tragic when military and police attacked and detained students. Police arrested more than 36 individuals and continue to conduct house-to-house inquiries. Students and many of the faculty remain on strike, and fear of retribution for speaking out has affected the community.

Since the end of Sri Lanka’s 30-year conflict in May 2009, USAID’s Office of Transition Initiatives has aimed to increase civic engagement of conflict-affected communities by implementing activities that give communities space to speak out about issues of importance to them. The demonstrations against sexual violence highlighted an endemic problem throughout Sri Lanka, while demonstrating to Jaffna authorities and the community that youth can still have a voice.

It also brought together individuals that never would have worked toward a common cause during the conflict.

“I am very happy to be here. I feel really proud,” said Kajani Munasinghae, a participant from the South. “Today when we went around and spoke with community members, they asked where we were from. They were completely shocked when my friend said Jaffna and I said Matara. They could not believe that youth from Matara and Jaffna could work together. We are doing it and we have shown them it is possible.”

Holding homemade signs, the youth walked one and a half miles across the northern capital of Jaffna. They distributed leaflets, provided stickers to vehicle owners, and participated in an interactive social media campaign to capture community members’ reactions to the demonstrations and thoughts on sexual violence.

Contact: Shane Perkinson, Asia Program Manager
sperkinson@usaid.gov (202) 712-0811

Follow us! @usaidoti

Visit us! <http://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/working-crises-and-conflict/promoting-peaceful-political-transitions>